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ABSTRACT

One hundred and sixteen test administrators in Job Service offices throughout the United States who are currently using the automated typing test software were contacted by telephone about the software. Sixty-nine percent have used the software less than 1 year, and 21 percent have used it more than 1 year. In 78 percent of the offices, there is only 1 computer available for testing, and in many offices the testing computer must be used for daily business operations between testing appointments. Problems of this sort will become more significant as the number of computerized typing tests administered increases. Offices report that most applicants choose the computerized tests, and that 94 percent make favorable comments about the test. Test administrators' comments also underscore the importance of training in testing and scoring. The majority (77 percent) of test administrators feel that it takes less time to administer the automated typing test than a test on a typewriter. Most respondents (69 percent) have more confidence in the automated test because of accuracy of scoring or timing. Most test administrators and applicants are comfortable with the software and have positive attitudes. Most identified problems are associated with training. (SLD)

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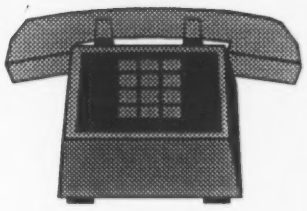

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TELEPHONE SURVEY OF TEST ADMINISTRATORS USING THE AUTOMATED TYPING TEST SOFTWARE

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TELEPHONE SURVEY OF TEST ADMINISTRATORS USING THE AUTOMATED TYPING TEST SOFTWARE

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MAY 1992

One hundred and sixteen test administrators in Job Service offices throughout the United States, who are currently using the automated typing software, were contacted by telephone about the software. The following is a summary of the administrators' feedback and resulting statistics.

Sixty percent reported they have been using the software less than one year; 19% reported they have been using the software less than 6 months; and 21% have been using it over one year. The longest time an office has used the software is three years.

In 78% of the offices, there is only one computer available for testing purposes. The maximum number of computers being used for testing in any office is 20. Although the clear majority of offices are administering all tests on one computer, the lack of equipment may partially be due to the fact that most offices are still in the experimentation and setup phase of the automated testing; as indicated above, 79% have been using the automated software for less than one year. Nonetheless, several offices reported that they need more computers, because they have encountered scheduling problems.

In addition, some offices are so much in need of computers that the testing computer serves a dual function: it is located on an employee's desk and used for daily business operations between testing appointments. This creates a two-fold problem: it causes a work disruption for the employee, and it creates a poor testing environment for the applicant. If budgets allow, it is more effective to have a computer in a separate testing room, which is used only for testing. Therefore, applicants and employees will not be interrupted, and the applicant is not disturbed with business activities and noise during his/her test.

The above problems will become more significant as the number of automated tests administrated increases. At present, 45% of the offices administer 5 or fewer tests per week using the software; 28% administer between 5 and 10; and 27% give 10 or more. One office administers as many as 75 tests, and another reported between 200-250 tests per week. The large differences may be due to some of the findings reported below, such as applicant preference and availability. Office location is a profound factor since larger cities not only administer more tests overall, but applicants in urban offices may also be more comfortable using the computer.

When given the choice between the computer and the typewriter for the typing test, 79% of the applicants select the computer test. However, in a large number of offices, the applicant is not given the option. The following are the exact comments made by various administrators about computer use:

- All applicants are tested using the computer.
- We strongly encourage hesitant souls by telling applicants that most employers use computers.
- The applicant is afraid of the automated typing test. (This was in a office where they are using the test 100% of the time. These applicants should not be asked to take the automated typing test. Applicants must be given the choice between the computer and the typewriter when testing.)
- Most applicants are nervous. (This office is giving the automated typing test 100% of the time.)
- One person refused to take the test on the P.C. (This office administers the automated typing test 100% of the time.)
- We were giving the test 100% of the time, and the error rate was extremely high. We knew the applicants could do better, so we asked them to come back and retest on typewriters.
- Why go back to cavemen times when we are in Jetson times?

One office conducted a survey in January 1992 on 277 applicants who took both the manual and automated tests. Only two percent of the applicants preferred the typewriter. This office could not afford staff time for both, and they felt there were not enough applicants to warrant keeping typewriters. Another office prefers the test on the typewriter. However, most of the clerical personnel in this city are using unsophisticated equipment and are consequently very unfamiliar with computers.

When asked about applicants' abilities and reactions to the automated typing test, administrators reported that 96% are able to follow the prompts on the screen and take the test with little or no direction from the test administrator. In addition, 94% of the applicants are making favorable comments about the software. The following are some comments and concerns from applicants, as reported by test administrators:

- o The automated typing software is more modern, up to date.
- o Many applicants enjoyed taking the automated typing test.
- o The applicants complain about their typing scores, not the software.
- o The applicants want to backspace and correct errors, and they cannot.
- o By far the biggest and most common complaint concerns the keyboards. (The preferred brands of keyboards are NCR, IBM, Epson, or Northgate Omnikey.)

The test is designed for applicants who are familiar with a computer. The applicants have little trouble with the software; however, some test administrators have never worked on a computer and have trouble running the system. Some difficulties include:

- o Not understanding how to insert a floppy disk in the disk drive.
- o The difference between Drive A and Drive B.
- o How to run the daily, weekly, and monthly backups.
- o Administrators are also experiencing problems when the applicant gets into a loop in the software. They are sometimes unable to get out of the loop to resume testing.

Training for test administrators is absolutely critical. The Western Field Center gives a three and one-half (3½) day training session on the new rules and software operation. Participants are given sample examinations to correct, which includes every possible mistake an applicant might make. When test administrators are told that the training will take three days, they are always surprised and cannot understand why the training should take so long. However, at the end of three days, trainees often say they could use more time.

Despite the need and desire for ample training, we found that 73% of the administrators had been trained in one day or less. Only 18% had received 2 to 3 days of training. Nine offices reported that they had never received any training, and they are having a lot of trouble running the system. Also, these nine offices are unaware that new scoring rules exist, which should be used for hand scoring typewriter tests. Additional concerns about training and software usage follow:

- Some administrators do not feel confident with the new scoring rules. They feel the rules are too confusing and it takes far too much time to hand score a typewriter test.

- Some administrators do not have time and/or are not confident that they are computing accurate words per minute. Therefore, they encourage applicants to take the automated typing test.

- Some are not using the new rules because they have not heard of them.

- Some administrators felt more confident using the old rules.

- One administrator responded that the new rules make no sense to her. She has to train two employees to use them, and she cannot train others on something she does not understand.

- Another administrator said the software is not as clear as she would like it. She is training another employee to use it and feels that the prompts are "a bit confusing."

- Many administrators feel confident about the automated test. One respondent said the manual is straight forward, and she has little problem scoring tests.

- The general consensus is that it takes longer to learn the new scoring rules than to learn to operate the computer; the rules are confusing.

- Some offices push applicants to take the automated typing test so they do not have to hand score the tests.

- Some liked the old way of scoring and believe the results would come out the same.

Eight-two percent of the test administrators reported that it takes them more time to hand score typewriter tests using the new scoring rules. Eight percent say it takes less time, and ten percent say it takes the same amount of time. Although scoring time has increased for the majority, administrators report it takes them only a few tests to feel competent in hand scoring the typewriter tests using the new rules. The following are reasons administrators gave for taking more time to correct typewriter tests:

- The rules are so different.

- The rules are more detailed.

- The administrator is being more careful.
- The administrator is not confident and needs more training.
- The administrator has to keep referring to his/her manual.
- The rules are hard to comprehend.
- The administrator has only corrected one or two tests.
- The rules are detailed, and the administrator does not feel that much work makes a substantial difference. In other words, the new rules are harder to implement, and the administrators cannot see how the end results change.

Partially because of the list above, 77% of the test administrators feel it takes less time to administer the automated typing test than the typewriter typing test. Other reasons given include the following:

- The administrators do not have to stay with the applicants, and they can do other things while testing is in progress.
- The automated test is self explanatory.
- The applicant can follow instructions without help.
- The administrators like the way the software administers, times and scores tests.
- The applicant asks fewer questions, and again, the administrator has fewer interruptions and more free time.
- Applicants do not contest the results of their tests.
- The administrator can test a large group of applicants and be finished in thirty minutes, including backup and time to print certificates. Administration of the typewriter test would take more than double this time.
- The automated typing software scores the test in seconds compared to hand scoring, which can take up to 20 minutes per test.

Fourteen percent of administrators believe it takes longer to administer the automated typing test. These are the reasons reported:

- o The administrator likes to stay with the applicant.
- o The office has only one computer. They have to give one test at a time.
- o People are not as familiar with computers as they think they are.

The remaining nine percent of the administrators feel it takes the same amount of time to administer the typing test on a computer as it does on the typewriter.

Sixty-nine percent of respondents have more confidence in administering the automated typing test than the manual system. Eight percent have less confidence, and 23% have the same amount of confidence. Although one office said they are giving 100% of the tests on the computer, they still prefer manual testing.

Scoring accuracy is one of the reasons for the large percentage of confidence in automated administration. Ninety-five percent of the administrators reported they have more confidence in the accuracy of scoring from the automated typing test than hand scoring. They feel the software catches more errors. Three percent said they had less confidence in the accuracy of scoring from the automated typing test than hand scoring, and two percent have the same amount of confidence.

Ninety-four percent of the administrators reported they have more confidence in the accuracy of timing with the automated typing test than hand timing. Some offices are still cross-checking using a stop watch. Three percent said they had less confidence in the accuracy of timing using the automated typing test, and three percent have the same amount of confidence. The latter three percent said timing was done by cassette when they were giving typewriter tests.

Eight-five percent of the test administrators are able to run the daily, weekly, and monthly backup without problems. The remaining 15% reported that the problems were with the weekly and monthly backup. Most of the problems were not software problems; problems are generally with the hardware or inadequately trained administrators. In cases where the administrator lacked proper training, we found there really was not a problem with the system; and we were able to correct the problem by explaining how to operate the software.

Ninety-eight percent of the test administrators reported they knew who to contact for help if they had a problem.

These are other comments made by the test administrators about the automated typing software in general:

- The automated typing test is convenient. Most applicants are computer literate.
- Automation is the best thing ever done. It makes my job easier.
- I am glad to be able to offer a choice to the applicant.
- I like the changes that have been made and look forward to more along the way.
- The automated typing test is great; the scoring is great. I do not like to hand score typewriter tests because the rules are more complex than they need to be.
- We need new forms of the test.
- The rules should be simplified.
- The directions for running daily, weekly and monthly backup should be rewritten.
- The test is valid and modern, and it is more applicable to today's job market.
- The automated typing test is the greatest thing that ever came about. It is a real time saver.
- I like it.
- I love it.
- I am really impressed with the automated typing software.
- I think it is a great time saver, and applicants really like it.

In summation, most test administrators and applicants are comfortable with and positive toward the automated typing software. It appears most problems tend to be related to training issues. Consequently, I recommend that test administrators participate in semi-annual training sessions for initial training and for operation reviews. The advantages of training are evident: administrators who received ample training appreciate the software, feel comfortable using it, and are not experiencing

any operation problems. Conversely, administrators with little or no training are disoriented with the software and scoring rules. Many are not able to operate the software at all and are not complying with the new rules when hand scoring the tests.